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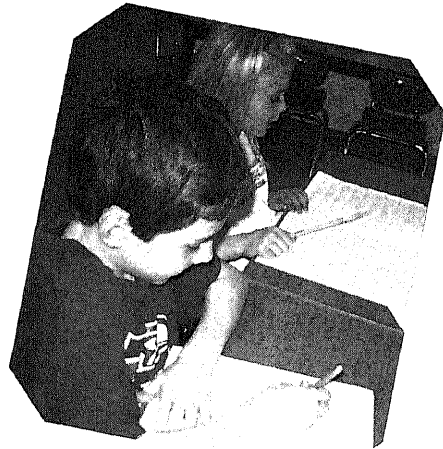
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8. Organize for Daily Writing



The author does not only write when he's at his desk, he writes all day long, when he is thinking, when he is reading, when he is experiencing; everything he sees and feels is significant to his purpose and, consciously or unconsciously, he is forever storing and making over his impressions.

—Somerset Maugham

“Well, what is writing workshop anyway? I’ve tried it but can’t get it to work.” Many teachers, new and experienced, share that sentiment, along with, “Nobody wants to do writing workshop any more. Preparing for the high-stakes tests takes all our time.”

A successful writing program requires a knowledgeable, organized teacher with excellent classroom management skills. Mostly, students need lots of time in which to write, a say in what they write about, strategies that allow them to problem solve independently (plan, revise, edit), and helpful response. Students need to know exactly what is expected—requirements for the writing, writing routines, how to get needed supplies, when to request a conference, what to do when they finish the assignment, and so on. And, most important, we teachers need to know how to teach writing well.

Broaden Your Definition of Writing Workshop

Think of writing workshop as the time in which everything that writers do to create a meaningful piece of writing for a reader takes place. You don't have to call it writing workshop; just call it writing. It can be journal writing, assigned writing, writing in math and science. But the term *writing workshop* is widely used, so that's what I call it.

HOW I DEFINE WRITING WORKSHOP

- ☐ Sustained, daily writing across the curriculum of mostly self-chosen topics.
- ☐ Writing for purposes and audiences that the writer values and understands.
- ☐ Playing around with language and learning how to craft writing.
- ☐ Conferring with students to respond to their writing, celebrate what they have done well, and teach the next steps for moving the writing forward.
- ☐ Teaching students what they need to know to write fluently and accurately.
- ☐ Doing what writers do to make a piece engaging for the reader.
- ☐ Publishing for real audiences.

There are no rigid procedures or one set of best practices. In kindergarten, start with shared writing and writing aloud short messages until students know how to form some letters and apply enough phonics to begin to write (to include drawing) on their own.

Think about how you teach writing. Writing workshop is *not*:

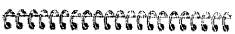
- ☐ A lockstep, linear process: prewrite, draft, revise, edit, publish.
- ☐ Focusing on individual writing traits.
- ☐ Following a program or template.
- ☐ Writing to prompt after prompt to prepare for a high-stakes test.
- ☐ Practicing skills in isolation.
- ☐ Writing topic sentences with supporting details.
- ☐ Assigning a topic without teaching.
- ☐ Writing for purposes students don't value or understand.

Having a set of procedures in place is less important than your beliefs and philosophy about teaching writing. Rather than organizing writing class around particular skills, steps, and minilessons, shift the focus to communicating a message to an intended reader. (See the Teaching in Action lesson on procedural writing, pages 316–322, for how that happens.) Your confident, knowledgeable mind-set will guide you better than any program or series of steps. Keep the following things in mind:

- ☐ Establish a genuine purpose and audience for all writing.
- ☐ Start by demonstrating (writing aloud, shared writing, sharing exemplary writing).
- ☐ Gradually release responsibility to students (a small group or partners conversing before writing or writing together, sustained writing with your guidance).
- ☐ Celebrate, respond, evaluate, teach, and move forward (have conferences with students).

Begin by identifying an important topic for a specific reader and then teach the skills students need to write about that topic—both those you anticipate they will need and those that crop up as they write. Imagine happy and energetic students and teachers, quality writing, and high-test scores too! That’s what happens when the writing program is all about excellent writing for genuine purposes and real audiences.

Find Time for Daily Writing



teaching tip

Keep the Flow

If you can’t have your students write every day, at least be sure to have them write on consecutive days—it’s easier to get the “flow” going. Writing regularly is more likely to lead to fluency.

Writing requires a daily commitment. Those who write every day in a regular planned writing session produce about twice the volume and twice the number of ideas as writers who write when they feel like it. Years ago Don Graves wrote that if we don’t teach writing at least four days a week for at least forty-five minutes, we shouldn’t bother to teach it at all. The National Writing Commission goes further and recommends that schools double the amount of time spent writing at every grade level (some of this time is spent writing at home). The only way you will “find” time for daily writing is to highly value it and recognize the power of writing for thinking and communicating across the curriculum.

It’s impossible to get a “flow” without revisiting and thinking about writing every day. Writing this book, my goal was to work for at least a few hours first thing every morning, my best writing time. Whenever life intervened and I missed even a day or two, it was always difficult to get started again. I first had to spend some time “getting back in the groove.”

Value Writing and You Will Make Time for It

Teachers tell me there's no time to put writing at the center of the curriculum. There is if you value it. Recently, my husband Frank and I were preparing to move from Cleveland, Ohio, where we had lived for over thirty years, to Seattle, where our son, daughter-in-law, and two granddaughters live. I was very busy packing, trying to sell our condo, teaching, and writing *Reading Essentials*. I was trying to decide, did I have time to visit my eighty-five-year-old, independent, working-full-time dad in New York for one or two days, or (more convenient for me) should I just wait until we moved and then have him out to visit? And then my dad had a brutal stroke. I spent nearly a month at his side and was involved in every step of his care. I "found" the time to be with him because it was important. We still moved as planned and I finished my book on time. None of that was easy, but we managed it. I am humbled by that experience, and I think about it often now in relation to the choices I make: We make time for what we value.

So when teachers say to me *I don't have time to teach writing every day*, my response is *Yes, you do, if you value it; if you don't have time, you're valuing something else more* (perhaps skills in isolation or phonics drills or worksheets). Take a look at your teaching day, and decide what's really most important for helping students become independent learners. Writing is one of the best ways I know for developing deep thinking, so I make time for it.

SET UP THE ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCCESS

A successful learning environment provides:

- ☐ The rationale for what you and your students are about to undertake.
- ☐ Explicit demonstrations and explanations.
- ☐ Lots of shared experiences.
- ☐ Opportunities for negotiating the curriculum. (Students should have some say in what they'll write about and how they'll write it.)
- ☐ Support and encouragement to all learners so they experience success (may mean calling on a reticent student and "hand-holding").

- ☐ Many opportunities for talking, predicting, listening, thinking, asking questions, giving input. (I often tell students, “I’m not looking for a right answer. I want your best thinking. You have something to say. Take your time.” And, “Smart people ask questions. There are no stupid questions. If you don’t know what something means, ask.”)
- ☐ Plenty of time for guided practice.
- ☐ Ongoing feedback—nudging, raising expectations, celebrating small and big successes and contributions.

Provide More Choice Within Meaningful Structure

Students need to be able to choose most of their writing topics if they are to take writing seriously, take pride in their work, and write with strong voice. But students also have to know something about the topic in order to write about it. So initially I rely on choice within structure, especially when I work in schools where students dislike writing and I want all students to experience immediate success, engagement, and enjoyment.

Tap the Potential of Choice Within Structure

Choice within structure means that students have a wide range of choices within a predetermined, engaging topic (one they often have had a hand in choosing). It does not mean writing to a rigid topic with strict requirements such as, “Begin with a topic sentence that includes who, what, and where.” Rather, it is a temporary scaffold to enable students to choose their own meaningful topics and write competently and confidently. Don Graves notes, “If the teacher doesn’t demonstrate choosing her own topic, kids won’t understand what choice means.” Kids need to see us wrestle with writing choices and then choose the topic we can write about most honestly.

Choice within structure leads to high-quality work if the topic is important to students. I always try to choose something that taps into students’ passions. The topic may be very broad, such as the experience of moving, or very focused, such as a special moment spent with someone you admire. I demonstrate for students how I first come up with a broad topic and then narrow it (see page 26–27).

teaching tip

Writing Fiction

Fiction is difficult to write well. Until you have taught students how to develop a character, setting, and problem and write dialogue that moves the story forward, tell your students in intermediate grades, "Write your fiction stories at home." Otherwise, many students write rambling, episodic pieces that take too much of our time.

The following topics, all of which were the result of choice within structure, produced well-written pieces written for meaningful purposes and valued audiences:

- ☐ Secrets of second graders (stories of our lives that no one knows).
- ☐ Heart poems (poems about things that really matter).
- ☐ A bird's-eye view of our school (informational essays in a school guidebook).
- ☐ Morning procedures (How-To writing).
- ☐ Thankful moments (personal narratives, letters).
- ☐ Heroes in our lives (informational writing, personal narratives, letters).

Teachers are always amazed that when kids really want to write about something, it's not just the content that improves. Their spelling and handwriting also improve, often dramatically (see Jon's letter, page 203). As fourth grader Ashton, after writing more freely than usual, said, "Why is it easier to write when you can write what you want instead of what the teacher has planned for you?" A wise comment indeed. Once we have shown students how to write a story, a poem, a letter, an informational essay, a "How To" book, and so on, they have the know-how to be able to create and innovate on these forms themselves.

Teach Students How to Choose Worthwhile Topics

While I do believe that kids should be able to freely choose what they write about and that "the topic is the single most important factor contributing to writer variability," I also believe we need to teach students how to make wise choices. I see teachers wasting way too much time having long conferences with students who have chosen to write, disjointedly, about things not worth reading about.

Students need guidelines for knowing when they've chosen their topic well—or poorly. Usually those guidelines are *do you care about the subject? can you tell a lot about it? can you include appropriate and interesting details?* Before students invest a lot of energy into a piece, we need to be sure they are prepared to write. Prepare your students by having them:

- ☐ They stop asking *how long does it have to be?*
- ☐ They write fluently.
- ☐ They willingly revise and edit.
- ☐ They take pride in handwriting and spelling.
- ☐ They are eager to share.
- ☐ Brainstorm writing ideas (orally or in a list).
- ☐ Talk about these ideas with you or with a classmate (scaffolded conversation).
- ☐ State their intention for writing—purpose and audience (can be themselves).
- ☐ Submit a written plan (mandatory for a large project).
- ☐ Immerse themselves in the form or genre (read and study exemplars).
- ☐ Practice writing in the genre with your guidance (through a class exploration of poetry, fiction, whatever).

Teach Sensible Planning Strategies

We tend to overdo *planning*, or what is commonly called *prewriting*. Either we direct kids through a lockstep process that may or may not be helpful, or we put so much time and energy into planning that kids are exhausted before they begin to write.

Use professional common sense. If you are using a writing kit or program with specific steps, use it as a temporary framework or scaffold, not a recipe. Ultimately, how kids plan their writing must be up to them. Many young writers' actual planning involves talking to themselves and drawing. Always requiring kids to plan before they write thwarts many writers. Sometimes, we just have to plunge in. When I write a letter to a friend, my prewriting is my thinking as I go along.

Expand Your Definition of Prewriting

By prewriting I refer to the thinking by which students generate ideas and plan and organize those ideas with the purpose of producing effective writing. Prewriting most often occurs before writing but also goes on during writing as the writer rethinks.

Prewriting is necessary to produce effective writing but need not be time-consuming or laborious—or even written down. Much of skilled writers' planning takes place mentally, especially when the topic is very familiar (a personal experience, for example). Some types of prewriting include but are not limited to:

- ☐ Brainstorming, listing ideas.
- ☐ Outlining.
- ☐ Discussing ideas (with teacher, peer, partner, self).
- ☐ Reading or viewing books, articles, movies, plays.
- ☐ Talking about text (literature study, debate, critique).
- ☐ Observing teacher demonstrations and think-alouds.
- ☐ Researching the subject (getting background information).
- ☐ Illustrating (drawing to spur writing).
- ☐ Creating a visual organizer.
- ☐ Rereading.
- ☐ Freewriting (also called quickwriting).

Do More Freewrites

In freewriting, students write for five or ten minutes (sometimes responding to a prompt) without concern for grammar and structure. Freewriting is a great way to build endurance, confidence, and writing fluency. Don't neglect freewriting as a way

to zero in on a writing topic and get the juices flowing. Often students who have no idea what they want to write about will uncover a topic through a freewrite. Freewriting is also helpful for getting students used to writing on demand, a skill necessary to complete school assignments and mandated writing tests.

Limit the Use of Graphic Organizers



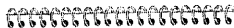
teaching tip

Visual organizers such as flow charts and time lines do work well in the content areas for helping students think about how to organize, learn, and integrate information.

While it's helpful to teach students about graphic organizers—it gives them planning and organizing options—don't overdo it. Some students expend so much time and energy creating graphic organizers or planning for the teacher, they are too tired to write.

When I make a written plan before I write (and as I continue to write), it always involves some kind of list or outline, never a graphic organizer. And I'm not alone. Each and every time I have teachers write to a prompt or ask them to write about a learning experience, no teacher has used a visual to plan what they will say. Everyone brainstorms some sort of list. The teaching implication is clear: Real writers organize their thoughts through brainstormed lists. Take a look at your own planning for writing and guide your teaching accordingly.

One teacher told me, "Some of my students can't write without a graphic organizer." Later, she reevaluated that statement after many students wrote beautifully organized pieces without them. What took their place? Excellent teaching—demonstrating planning, thinking, and writing out loud in front of students; holding public conversations with a few students; giving kids time to talk to each other and share ideas; letting kids choose how to plan their writing; demonstrating a conference.



teaching tip

Start a New Page

Don't always end your demonstration writing on the last line at the bottom of the page; doing so sends kids the message that when they get to the end of the page they're done.

Do More Demonstration Writing

Don't expect high-quality writing from your kids unless you're modeling what high-quality writing looks and sounds like. This is just as critical for kindergartners as it is for older students. Many teachers find that when they do more and better modeling—writing for and with their students—everything improves: kids' engagement, abundance of ideas for writing, willingness to write and take risks, knowledge of how and what to write, and the quality and quantity of their writing. Your demonstrations can take many forms:

- ☐ Writing aloud.
- ☐ Shared writing.

teaching tip

To Model Better

- ☐ Be yourself. Write what interests you.
- ☐ Write the same exciting story you tell orally. Include the details that make the story come alive.
- ☐ Don't get distracted by kids' questions. Keep writing.
- ☐ Don't go on so long you exhaust the students. Stop when they're still engaged.

- ☐ Sharing examples—reading aloud, celebrating students' writing, viewing a video. (*What do you notice? You could try that, too.*)
- ☐ Conducting scaffolded conversations before writing.

Second-grade teacher Cami Kostecki attributes the big leap her kids made in writing to her demonstration writing:

When I took the time to effectively model my story, kids were engaged. I didn't hear, "I don't know what to write" nearly as much. Students' writing improved because they had a complete idea of what was expected of them. By the time they got to their seats, they were excited and ready to start their stories.

Have More Conversations About Writing

A critical part of teaching writing is having students talk about their writing before they write, while they are writing, and even afterward. Scaffolded conversations with students are essential for producing excellent, coherent texts. I used to go around the room and say to each student, "What are you going to write about?" and get a few words or a one-liner in return, often followed by superficial writing. Now I have in-depth conversations with one or two students—with the whole class listening in—to ensure the students have rich ideas and language to think about as well as models of thinking to emulate. What a difference it makes in the quality and quantity of every student's writing.

These conversations take a number of forms:

- ☐ Teacher and student (for an example, see pages 110, 296–297) (*demonstration*).
- ☐ Student and student, coached by the teacher (*guided practice*).
- ☐ "Turn and talks" at desks or within a group (*guided practice*).
- ☐ Conversations initiated by students on their own (*independent practice*).

Classrooms that have more high-level talk going on have higher reading and writing achievement. When I draw students out through person-to-person dialogue, their thinking clarifies and goes deeper, and their story emerges. All students, not just the ones I am talking with, benefit and get ideas for their writing. These conversations are consistent with research showing that students make higher gains when teachers ask authentic, open-ended questions and continue with probing questions about students' responses. (See my conversation with Derek in the spelling conference on the accompanying DVD.)

teaching tip

Speak in a respectful, kind voice. (Let students know you care about them.)

A kindergarten teacher comments on the power of conversations:

Not only does conversation focus the students' writing and bring out their individual voices, it boosts their own confidence and self-esteem. Forget the dreaded show-and-tell. I'm using conversation and talk before writing! What an amazing difference this has made, and one that I was able to notice immediately. I am now laughing at the students' writing, mainly because it is so full of joy and not the typical "I like."

Keep It Simple and Direct

There is no formula for these before-during-and-after-writing conversations. I think of the process as one person (me) talking to a fascinating person (the student) and genuinely trying to learn more about the writer and what she or he is trying to say. It's a very natural kind of conversation (see the examples on pages 208–209 and on the accompanying DVD). It is never *Tell me more* just to have the student add more information to make the piece longer, but rather a genuine and sensitive listening to, questioning of, and responding to this particular student. My purposes are to:

teaching tip

Use sticky notes to jot down reminders to the child—specific language used, a goal you have set together. Be sure to demonstrate how to use these sticky notes when writing.

- ☐ Convince the student he or she has a worthwhile story to tell.
- ☐ Help the student tell a meaningful story.
- ☐ Acknowledge all responses.
- ☐ Encourage lively language and interesting content.
- ☐ Scaffold the language of thinking and organization.
- ☐ Help narrow the focus: *What's the most important thing that happened or that you want to remember? Just tell about that.*
- ☐ Get students to slow down, carefully observe and remember, and fill in the details.
- ☐ Ensure that the student has enough information and confidence to begin to write or continue writing.
- ☐ Guide the "drawing" part of a child's story so that the pictures go with it.

When the student offers a "gem"—memorable language, a fascinating idea—I immediately jot it on a sticky note so I'll remember it. Doing so also signals to the student (and the other students who are listening in):

- ☐ My teacher thinks it's great.
- ☐ This is important information to include.
- ☐ There it is so I won't forget it if I choose to use it.

Teacher Talk

- ☐ *That is so interesting. So then what happened? [encouraging more detail]*
- ☐ *How did you feel about that? [encouraging personal voice]*
- ☐ *What did he say when you told her that? [encouraging dialogue]*
- ☐ *So what did that look like? Was it red like the rose on my desk or red like Jana's sweater or red like the color of your writing notebook? [encouraging descriptive detail]*
- ☐ *I can't wait to hear what happened after that! What did you do? [encouraging storytelling]*
- ☐ *Okay, slow way down so I can picture exactly what happened. [encouraging elaboration and description]*

Include Peer Talk

Especially for our English language learners and writers who struggle, talking before writing clarifies their thinking and makes writing easier. Conversation is the primary way most ethnic groups of color in the United States communicate, with the roles of speaker and listener being "fluid and interchangeable." Any "strategies that stimulate elaboration or problem solving are likely to foster better story writing."

After scaffolded conversations with one or two students, I often take a few more minutes to have students "turn and talk" and tell their story to a partner. I encourage students to use the kind of language I've been modeling. Even our youngest writers can say to a partner, *Why did you do that?* or, *That's so funny. What happened then?* Use the optimal learning model (see inside front cover and below) to show what productive peer talk looks like and sounds like:

- ☐ Teacher demonstration with a student (with class listening in).
- ☐ Two students demonstrating (with teacher guidance and class looking on).
- ☐ Talking explicitly about what students did well, need to work on (guided practice).
- ☐ Trying it out (teacher circulating to see how it's going).
- ☐ Independent practice.

| <i>Who Holds Book/Pen</i> | <i>Degree of Explicitness/Support</i> |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Teacher /Student | ↓ DEMONSTRATION |
| Teacher /Student | ↓ SHARED DEMONSTRATION |
| <i>gradual handover of responsibility</i> | |
| Student /Teacher | ↓ GUIDED PRACTICE |
| Student /Teacher | ↓ INDEPENDENT PRACTICE |

The Optimal Learning Model

Do not underestimate the power of talk on writing quality. Informal conversations among students as they write influences the amount and quality of revisions students are willing to make. Conversations with others help students express their ideas more fully and make them their own.

Establish Criteria for Writing

teaching tip

Get to Struggling Writers First

Get them started so they're not just sitting there. When your struggling writers are immediately successful (with your guidance), you save time, because there's no need to sort out their confusions later.

Often I establish criteria with students *after* they have had a chance to see me write or we've done a shared writing and/or they have studied examples of other authors' work (to include former students). Before asking, *What makes a good letter?* write one aloud yourself or as a shared-writing exercise. Then ask, *What did you notice?* and establish criteria. This is in keeping with highly literate classrooms, which tend to be inquiry and response based. Telling students the criteria without their input is likely to be less effective in promoting high achievement.

Setting reasonable criteria makes it more likely that quality writing will result, especially when students are attempting a new genre. For example, to ensure success for all fifth graders writing informational essays (see pages 316–322 for examples), we broke the essay into three parts (which also made paragraphing a certainty):

- ☐ Opening statement—state the topic, get the reader's attention.
- ☐ Information—provide facts and supporting details.
- ☐ Summary—restate the main points in a new way to remind the reader why the topic is important.

Make Excellent Management a Priority

I rarely have a classroom management problem. Partly it's because I teach with a sense of urgency; that is, I attempt to make every minute count and ensure that my instruction and evaluation are relevant and interesting. I teach all the skills but in service to the “big idea” of what we're working on. Because the work is engaging, I have students' attention. Better classroom managers are more likely to teach for meaning and less likely to have mastery of discrete skills as their main instructional goal. This makes perfect sense; it's easy to lose kids' attention when the work is tedious and broken into little pieces.

teaching tip

Observe a colleague you respect who has excellent management.

Maintain a Predictable Structure

The only way to “fit” writing in every day is to write all day across the curriculum. Don't separate “writing workshop” from other writing. Writing is writing—in math, reading, science, and social studies; in journals, writing folders, or notebooks; on papers, charts, the computer. Take a look at the writing schedules on pages 185–186 and notice how these teachers “find” time for daily writing.

LEE PAYTON'S SCHEDULE, GRADE 1

Previous Schedule

| | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| 8:50-9:00 | Calendar (includes math skills) | |
| 9:00-9:30 | Shared Reading (sentence strips or big books) | |
| 9:30-10:20 | Guided Reading (students worked on seatwork assignments—not reading or writing) | |
| 10:20-10:35 | Recess | |
| 10:35-11:05 | Journals (only basic modeling by me; no conversations to help them) | |
| 11:05-11:35 | McCracken Spelling | |
| 11:35-12:20 | Lunch/Recess | |
| 12:20-12:35 | Read Aloud (chapter book) | <i>Now we write together and read the text together—2 to 3 times a week. Also, they read Morning Message (by the teacher). These include all subject areas.</i> |
| 12:35-1:35 | Mathland (district program) | |
| 1:35-1:50 | Recess | |
| 1:50-2:35 | Science/Social Studies/Health/ Specialist (P. E., library, music) | |
| 2:35-2:50 | Read Alouds/Sing/Class Meeting | |

Current Schedule

| | | |
|-------------|--|---|
| 8:50-9:00 | Calendar (includes math skills) | |
| 9:00-9:30 | Shared Reading/Writing Read Alouds | |
| 9:30-10:30 | Guided Reading/Independent Reading and Writing | <i>Independent writing is letters, poems, lists, stories—but not journals. Added independent work that is real reading and writing. 30 min. independent reading/ 30 min. independent writing.</i> |
| 10:30-11:00 | Math journals | |
| 11:00-11:15 | Recess | |
| 11:15-12:15 | Writing | <i>Shortened spelling because do more in our journals.</i> |
| | Spelling (McCracken) 10 min. (district requirement) | |
| | Mini-lesson 10 min. | |
| | Independent Writing/Individual Conferences (30 min.) | <i>Previously writing time was 30 min. Now we have 20 min. more of intentional teaching/modeling and writing.</i> |
| | Sharing/Celebrating (10 min.) | |
| 12:15-12:55 | Lunch/Recess | |
| 12:55-1:10 | Read Aloud—Chapter books | |
| 1:10-1:25 | Mathland (district program) | <i>Now include literature that relates to math too.</i> |
| 1:25-2:05 | Science/Social Studies/Health/ Science Journals | |
| 2:05-2:20 | Recess | |
| 2:20-2:50 | Specialists (P. E., library, music) | <i>Added science journals—write facts, label pictures and do more expository writing.</i> |

KARI OSTERVEEN'S SCHEDULE, GRADE 4

8:35—Open Door. Kids do their jobs—coats, lunch sign in, etc.

Morning assignment: Always something little—such as read to a friend, review of a math or spelling skill.

8:50 Correct the morning assignment, if needed. Meet as a class on the floor.

9:00–10:20 Integrated Writing Time (see footnote)

Focus of our day: Which could include a shared writing, a minilesson, or a continuation of a previous lesson (10–15 minutes)

Work time: This would include independent work time, me working with small groups on a focus, or writing conferences (30–45 minutes)

Sharing time: We meet, share what we wrote, and talk about our writing

10:20–10:35 Recess

10:35–11:05 Music, P. E., Library (rotates daily)

11:10–11:40 Independent reading choice time (30 minutes)

11:45–12:15 Lunch

12:15–12:30 Chapter book story (15 minutes)

12:30–1:30 Integrated Reading Time (see footnote)

Focus of our day: Which could include a shared piece of text, a minilesson, or a continuation of a previous lesson (10–15 minutes)

Reading time: This would include an assigned piece of text, working with a book group, or conferencing with me (30–40 minutes)

Reflection time: Discuss what we notice an author has done, vocabulary that we liked or want to know about or predictions about the text (10–15 minutes)

Recess

1:45–2:45 Math

Clean up, homework, mail

3:00 Dismissal

The biggest addition to my schedule has been the incorporation of sharing our writing. We always make time for sharing, even if it takes away time for something else. We have learned more from the sharing of our ideas and what we have written, than any other thing that we have done all year!

Footnote: I integrate many curricular areas. For example, our writing time might be used for explaining our mathematical thinking or for writing something that we learned about the state of Washington or writing a scientific study. Integrated Reading Time would include Social Studies text, Our Science stories, as well as genre or author studies.

Build a Climate of Trust

A successful writing classroom depends not only on clearly established routines and procedures but also on a classroom climate that encourages students to take risks without fear of failure. A foundation of respect, trust, bonding, and camaraderie underlies every successful writing classroom. Much of that trust builds from the way we talk to and confer with students. We need to bond with each child to ensure learning. It is not enough to have all the organizational pieces in place. To have successful and willing writers, we must also create a caring classroom in which students feel comfortable, secure, and appreciated. The tone of the writing classroom has to impart this message: *The writing work we do is worthwhile, enjoyable, and important; it may be hard sometimes, but I am here to help you; you can do it.*

Employ a Flexible Framework

Use the time you spend teaching writing flexibly, but allocate most of it to having students *write*—that is, let them apply what you have already demonstrated and they have been practicing. Give them control of what they want to say for a clearly understood purpose to a clearly understood reader. Think about your students' needs, not a set of required skills or procedures. Be sure to apply the optimal learning model.

SUGGESTED TIME FRAMES FOR DAILY WRITING

| Writing Activity | Time Frame |
|---|--|
| Demonstration or minilesson based on students' needs and interests as well as curriculum requirements | 5–30 minutes (typically 5–15 minutes) |
| Sustained writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students writing (uninterrupted, quiet) • Teacher may also be writing (on same topic as students) • Students having a one-on-one content or editing conference with the teacher • Students conversing and conferencing with each other | 20–40 minutes |
| Whole-class share | 10–15 minutes |

teaching tip

Flip-Flop Time Allotments

Have a shorter mini-lesson and give more time to sharing, and vice versa.

Although occasionally a minilesson or whole-class share may take twenty minutes or more, aim for no more than ten minutes for each so students have time to write. Some days you may be tempted to skip whole-class share. Don't. It's such a valuable way to acknowledge and celebrate students' efforts, teach what students need, and give all students writing ideas (see pages 207–216 and 336–350).

Establish Daily Routines and Model Expected Behavior

Most students and teachers write best in a quiet setting. Model and make explicit what you mean by “work quietly”—what it looks and sounds like: sitting in a chair or other designated spot, using a “whisper voice” (see my writing demonstration on page ??), having your materials with you. (Of course, for kindergarten and grade 1, it can seem more like sustained noisy writing as they talk, share, and help one another!) Kindergarten teacher Karen Sher, in Shaker Heights, Ohio, uses the term *private work time* (a period of five or ten minutes) and signals its arrival by turning on little lamps on each table.

Also model all behavior you expect, such as how to get supplies, when and how to sharpen pencils, how to confer or talk with a peer, how to listen and give helpful response, how to seek help, and so on.

Apply the optimal learning model:

- ☐ Show what the targeted behavior looks like and sounds like, and perhaps create a chart with students listing the things they observe (*demonstration*). (There is an example of such a chart on page 117.)
- ☐ With a student, model the behavior (*shared demonstration*).
- ☐ Have two or more students try out the behavior with the class looking on (*guided practice*). Scaffold and teach as necessary. Ask the class, *What did you notice?*
- ☐ Expect students to implement the modeled behavior (*independent practice*).

Continue to monitor the behavior until it is well established and students are doing it naturally on their own. Evaluations like this (usually oral, but sometimes written) can be done with the whole class or a small group at the end of a writing session (or whenever a problem arises). Ask:

- ☐ *How did we do today with this?*
- ☐ *What went well?*
- ☐ *What do we still need to work on?*
- ☐ *How could we have done better?*
- ☐ *What will we do differently tomorrow?*

Go back to the learning model again, as necessary.

teaching tip








Listen for Silence

When kids are engaged in their writing, the classroom gets quiet, or there is a hum of soft conversation. A quiet room helps writers get started writing more easily. Even kindergartners can manage five or ten minutes of quiet if it is modeled and expected.





In Bryna Osborne's first grade in Vancouver, Washington, it took just two days to move from a whole-class share in which students constantly interrupted and talked over one another to a peaceful climate of respectful listening. It happened because we made our expectations known, modeled the desired behavior, and kept the sharing moving. Modeling desired behavior saves valuable time in the long run. Bryna comments, "I thought it would be very difficult to teach my class the importance of purposeful sharing; to my surprise the transition was fairly seamless because we had modeled our expectations."

TRY IT APPLY IT

Model Writing Behavior

-  Write on every other line (allows room for making changes).
-  Write on only one side of the paper (allows for cutting and pasting and easy rearrangement of pages).
-  Date everything (shows writing history and progress).
-  Write legibly (makes it easier to read drafts).
-  Spell high-frequency words correctly, and use your best invented spelling for other words (raises expectations for spelling, makes drafts easier to read, and saves time during editing process).
-  Keep writing records (writing history, sticky notes of suggestions, writing plans).
-  Model on a projected transparency using the same paper your students will be using—size, lines, spacing.

Eliminate Distractions

-  Do what you can to have a peaceful writing time.
-  Have all pencil sharpening done before school, and have a ready supply of sharpened pencils at hand to avoid the added noise and time wasted with students walking about instead of writing.
-  Make sure students know procedures for bathroom breaks, getting supplies, requesting a conference. (Model all of these.)
-  Advocate for fewer school-day interruptions, such as no, or very limited, public address announcements during the school day.

Keep Records

Don't get bogged down with lots of forms and checklists that are not useful. These days, I use as few forms as possible to keep track of students' writing. I stopped using revising and editing checklists when I noticed that students were

teaching tip

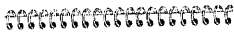
Quiet, Please

Conference in a private space (one-on-one or in a small group) with kids who need help getting started. Keeping the room quiet enables the other writers to get started right away. Once a student has his idea, send him back to write.

dutifully filling them out for me but not using them for themselves. Essential records include but are not limited to:

- ☐ Minilessons taught.
- ☐ Cumulative writing history.
- ☐ Conference notes.

Having your students keep track of the minilessons you teach (see a third grader's notes on two minilessons, shown on page 191) makes your instruction explicit for students, caregivers, and teachers and makes it easy to refer back to what has been taught. I also depend on a cumulative writing record, which is similar to the daily reading record students keep. Keeping a writing history lets students, family members, and teachers know what genres students are focusing on, who the audience is for the writing, what's being completed and published (and when), and what types of writing need to be encouraged. (See the sample form in Appendix E.) You will also want to keep informal conference records (see page 217) to monitor what students are working on, what you are teaching, what goals have been set, and how the writer is progressing. Anecdotal notes can be easily organized in a notebook; use stick-on tabs with the children's names.



teaching tip

Save Everything

Keep all drafts, notes, sticky notes, and cross-outs so we, students, and parents can see their thinking process.

Organize Student Writing

Most teachers experiment with different ways to keep student writing organized. There is no single best way. Many teachers find that a spiral notebook or folder works best for young writers. For students above grade 2, I prefer a three-ring binder with sections for minilesson notes, writing forms (see Appendices D–I), drafts, specific genre writing (poetry, fiction, nonfiction), published works.

Put Genre Study in Perspective

Many districts require that certain genres—poetry, memoir, personal letters, informational essays—be taught in certain grades. Often, because of low test scores and/or a desire for more structure and consistency, the writing focus becomes learning step-by-step rules of the genre or writing form. For example, teachers focusing on friendly letters teach the language and form of the letter: heading, greeting, body, closing signature. The kids can write such a letter, but they're not much worth reading. When I write a letter, I'm not thinking "heading," I'm thinking about putting the date in so the person I'm writing to knows when I wrote it. I'm not thinking about "body" but rather the message I want to send and how I want to say it. If you focus on engaging the writer with real writing for real readers, you can teach the essentials of excellent writing, and students will be able to transfer those to any genre.

9-12-2003 ^{Writing Time} Mini Lesson #4

| Looks | Sounds | Feel |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| • students writing at their desks | • silent | • relaxed and comfortable |
| • Journals open | • music in background | • safe to share ideas |
| Pencils writing | • teacher conferencing | |
| | • sharing stories | |

I like writing because it seems like I'm inside my journal.

* We wrote this together, I wrote on overhead and students wrote in their journals. I made a class chart as well.

Mini Lesson #5 9/15/03

What Good writers Do

1. reread
2. Stick to their topic
3. Check to see if writing makes sense
4. writes for the reader to get a picture in their mind
5. Write more than one sentence.
6. Uses interesting words
7. use humor
8. Can use exciting marks
9. good writers think about ^{the writing}
10. make the writing better by crossing out

Keeping track of minilessons: Setting up the writing classroom

Name _____

| Title/Topic | | Audience* | Genre** | Start date | Finish date | What happened to it?*** |
|--------------------------|--|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Capture the moment class | | | narrative | 9-9-03 | 9-16-03 | Published |
| Oregon | | self | narrative | 9-16-03 | | |
| ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ | 9-17-03 | | |
| ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ | 9-18-03 | | |
| ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ | 9-19-03 | 9-19-03 | Publish |
| How to's | | self class | How to | 9-19-03 | 9-19-03 | |
| Poetry | | self class | Poems | 9-19-03 | ↓ | |
| ↓ | | ↓ Mom | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | |
| Super Kid | | Emily/self | comic | 9-23-03 | | |
| ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ | 9-24-03 | | |
| ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ | 10-1-03 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

*peers, teacher, parents, business company
 **poetry, letter, narrative, directions, report, research, book review, persuasive, summary
 ***rough draft, computer work, shared, published

One student's writing history for September

Simplify Genre Teaching

There is no research suggesting which particular genres are most effective to teach. Almost all effective writing includes description, detail, careful word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and so on. Don't go overboard on units of study or genre. Think about adopting a broader stance:

- ☐ Narrative genres (stories, fairy tales, personal narratives).
- ☐ Informational genres (explanations, persuasive pieces, essays, all-about books).
- ☐ Other genres (poetry, biography).

Appendix L lists the common elements of several specific genres.



All the lessons in the Teaching in Action section have genuine audiences and purposes for the writing the kids are learning to do. We teach the genre or form (persuade, describe, explain, instruct, narrate, and so on) as a vehicle for getting our message across to the intended readers.

Make Schoolwide Decisions About Genre Study

Decide at the school and district level what genres/forms you will be teaching at each grade level—when they're introduced and practiced and expected to be mastered. Include such forms as personal narratives, descriptions, reports, letters, poetry, summaries, book reviews (not book reports), fiction, essays.

The chart on page 193 shows one school's master plan. Before the plan was created no one knew who was teaching what genres, when they were being introduced, and if and when they were revisited. It was, as one teacher noted, a free-for-all. Establishing schoolwide expectations made teaching far more intentional.

TRY IT APPLY IT

-  Devote a few staff meetings to examining who's teaching what genres when. Meet first by grade levels, and list what you teach. Then, on an oversize matrix, list everything that's being taught at your grade level. Then have the entire faculty look at all the charts and establish consistency from grade to grade. Once you introduce a genre at one grade level, ensure it's revisited.
-  Meet at your grade level and decide how you can teach the required genres using real purposes and audiences. (See the ideas in Chapter 5.)

| BBC Writing forms | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| | Text form | To | With | By |
| | | Introduce Demonstrate | Guided practice | Independent practice |
| WASL (assessed on the high- stakes state test) | Personal letter | K-5 | → | → |
| | Retelling | K-5 | → | → |
| | Responses to lit. | K-5 | → | → |
| | Compare/contrast | K-5 | → | → |
| | Expository (explanations) | K-5 | → | → |
| | Fiction/narrative | K-5 | → | → |
| BBC (expected by the school) | Summaries | 2 | → | → |
| | Reports | K | → | → |
| | Poetry | K | → | → |
| | Business letters | 4 | → | → |
| | Persuasive pieces | 4 | → | → |
| | Journal writing | K | → | → |
| | Book related writing (reviews, short summaries) | K-5 | → | → |
| | Procedural writing (steps-directions) | K-5 | → | → |
| | | | | |

One school's master plan outlining teaching goals for genres and writing forms

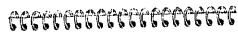
Focus First on Purposes of Writing

When the purpose of writing is to teach how to write a letter, essay, persuasive piece, or fiction, we make writing harder for kids. Focus first on meaningful purposes to real readers, such as:

- ☐ Recording findings (thinking in problem solving, observing and noting scientific changes, saying what we wonder about).
- ☐ Entertaining.
- ☐ Evaluating.
- ☐ Organizing information.
- ☐ Remembering (special events, things to do).
- ☐ Giving thanks.
- ☐ Communicating.
- ☐ Persuading.
- ☐ Informing.
- ☐ Storytelling.

"You learn to write by grappling with a real subject that truly matters to you." The purpose of writing determines the genre or form writing takes, not the other way around. Kids need familiarity with form and structure, but they need good ideas and reasons to write first.

Start by Engaging Students



teaching tip

Help Students Engage

When a student has written little or nothing well into the writing period, it often means he is not invested in the topic. Take him aside and have a conversation: find out what he's really interested in. (Even with an assignment, try to provide some choice within structure. Let him know you expect him to write.

The hardest part of teaching a required genre is to figure out a way to present it that engages students' hearts and minds. That's where I do most of my planning: thinking about possibilities and discussing them in back-and-forth conversations with myself and with the teachers with whom I'm working. Then we negotiate the curriculum with the students.

Here's an example of how that works. I was asked to teach "multiparagraph informational essays" in fifth grade, since this type of essay was required by the district and was also an element on the state tests. However, nobody could define what an informational essay was. After much discussion and some research, we defined an essay as writing that presents important information about a subject—that is, the writer presents an opinion or information and supports it with evidence. The essay can be informational, persuasive, and/or personal.

Don Murray says, "The most effective essays, I believe, are those that find a way for the writer to reveal a process of thought that invites the reader to think alongside the writer." And the editor of the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times* offers this advice as part of his guidelines for submitting an opinion piece for the editorial page: "Make one argument thoroughly, point by point; the more detail the better. If you try to do too much you can wind up with an article that, in striving to say everything, ends up saying nothing." That good advice is exactly what we try to teach our youngest writers, even in their journal stories.

Because I wanted to get students excited about writing, I did not say, "This week I'm going to teach you how to write a multiparagraph, informational essay, because it's required by your district." If I had, I would have lost them as willing writers. Instead, I said:

You know what kids? I had this great idea. I was thinking how fabulous it would be if there was a guidebook to your school. It would have been a great help to me as a new person to receive such a book when I arrived—to help orient me, to find my way around, to get to know what's important here, who the teachers are, and how school operates. What do you think? Or we could do a book about what every fifth grader should know to be prepared for middle school. Let's vote on the idea we like best.

When students chose the guidebook, I employed the optimal learning model: presenting demonstrations, setting purposes through shared writing, conducting scaffolded conversations, monitoring sustained writing by applying a simple rubric we established, holding conferences regarding content and conventions, and publishing. Highlights (the complete lesson is in the Teaching in Action section) are in the list below. Providing simple yet explicit criteria made it possible for every student to succeed on the first draft. Here are some highlights from our lesson on informational writing (see pages 105–110):

- ☐ Established the purpose (see the topic chart on page 106) and the audience (see the chart on page 106) for writing a guide to the school.
- ☐ Wrote one page of the book together (see “How to Work in a Small Group,” on page 106).
- ☐ Had scaffolded conversations before writing (page 110 contains excerpts of a conversation with Victoria about how people dress in Wisconsin) and “turn and talk” peer conversation.
- ☐ Drafted the individual pieces, shared them as a class, revisited the drafts, discussed them in conferences.
- ☐ Published the guidebook, made decisions on presentation: cover color and design, font, style, layout, illustrations, map, headings, borders, photos. (See DVD for several published pieces.)

Teach it First, Label it Later

While you do want to teach students the parameters of each genre and how it’s used in the world, use common sense; don’t go overboard with rigid procedures or get hung up with terminology. For example, almost all writing involves multiparagraphs and is expository or informational. Narrative writing is also expository writing. You can drive yourself crazy if you focus too much on the lingo. Think *less* about teaching an “expository multiparagraph essay” or any genre and *more* about teaching the student.

At the end of the week, when the fifth graders had completed their essays, I said to them:

What you wrote this week are called informational essays. Your district and the state test require you to know how to write these, and now you do. If you are asked to write an informational essay, it’s no big deal. Remember the criteria you kept in mind while writing the pieces for this guidebook.

Teach Nonfiction Writing

Expository writing develops more slowly than narrative writing, but this may be because children have less experience with and exposure to expository writing and see fewer demonstrations of it. Most of what they hear and read is fiction—all the more reason to be sure we teach informational writing and include lots of interesting nonfiction in our read-alouds and classroom libraries.

At the same time, it's important not to overload students with nonfiction writing that requires a lot of research. Teaching students to do research is more challenging and requires a separate, intensive teaching focus. Too often we ask students to write reports before they know how; for example, we assign research reports but don't teach kids how to summarize (see pages 127–129), a prerequisite for writing a successful report.

Provide more time for browsing nonfiction (after you've modeled how to browse) and immersing children in the genre before expecting them to write. Starting in kindergarten introduce nonfiction text features like these:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Table of contents | <input type="checkbox"/> Diagrams | <input type="checkbox"/> Drawings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Captions | <input type="checkbox"/> Charts | <input type="checkbox"/> Highlighted text |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Labels | <input type="checkbox"/> Timelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Glossary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headings | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographs | <input type="checkbox"/> Index |

Teacher Talk

- ☐ *What information does the author want the reader to know?*
- ☐ *How does the author organize it?*
- ☐ *Examine the book(s). What do you notice?*
- ☐ *Why do you think the author has a table of contents? a glossary?*
- ☐ *Look at the contents page. If you wanted to know about [blank] where would you start reading? Yes, that's right. With nonfiction, you don't always have to start at page 1. You can start with the part you're interested in.*
- ☐ *Where else could you look to find a topic of interest?*

A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING WRITING GENRES

-
- ☐ **Find out what kids know about the genre, and chart their responses.** Ask, "What do you know about [blank]?"
 - ☐ **Gather lots of examples of the genre at a level appropriate for most of your students.** (Ask your school's librarian for help.)
 - ☐ **Let students, in pairs or small groups, browse through these materials.** Model first. Ask students, "What did you notice, learn?" Add their responses to the chart you've begun. Notice and brainstorm any unique language. (*Immersion, demonstration.*)

- ☐ **Discuss and chart, “What makes a good [blank]?”** (*Determining criteria, shared demonstration.*)
- ☐ **With your students, choose one text to study together.** Make sure all students can see the text as you read it aloud, or have them read it in a small group or with a partner. (*Shared demonstration, guided experience.*)
- ☐ **Write in the genre together as a class.** Use the language of the genre. Refer to the chart you’ve developed. (*Shared demonstration.*)
- ☐ **Identify additional criteria for what to include when writing in the genre.** (*Shared demonstration.*)
- ☐ **Prepare to write** (have students gather resources, brainstorm ideas, talk with you and their peers, perhaps conduct interviews and generate a list of questions). (*Guided practice.*)
- ☐ **Write for a sustained period in the form of the genre for an authentic audience and purpose.** (*Independent practice.*)
- ☐ **Confer with students and teach what’s needed** (celebrate, assess, teach, revise, edit). (*Guided and independent practice.*)
- ☐ **Publish and share with intended audience.** (*Celebration and independent practice.*)
- ☐ **Encourage students to write more pieces in the genre.** (*Independent practice.*)

Write and Publish More Short Pieces



teaching tip

Move On

We stay too long with most writing. Make sure your students are doing a variety of writing, not just a project that goes on for weeks or months.

Length has nothing to do with quality, and it’s quality we’re after. We want kids to be focused, coherent writers who engage their readers with interesting, accurate writing. I love doing short pieces with students, because they take less time and are easy to publish. By the end of a week, we usually have a completed piece; we have learned and practiced everything important about writing, such as narrowing the topic, making it clear for the reader, writing an energetic lead, and so on; and no one is exhausted. I recommend that starting in second grade, at least one piece of writing be taken through to final copy each month.

Writing short pieces:

- ☐ Connects process with product more quickly.
- ☐ Makes some revision likely, without overwhelming the student.
- ☐ Ensures necessary practice in editing.
- ☐ Provides completed work for parents, students, administrators.
- ☐ Makes conferences more manageable.
- ☐ Is more enjoyable, for both students and teacher.

Short pieces can take many forms, such as brochures, booklets, posters, brief essays, vignettes, letters, poems, and cartoons. See pages 112–118 for numerous ideas for short pieces. The following lists some short writing projects, along with simple writing criteria.

**TRY IT
APPLY IT**

Short Writing Projects with Simple Criteria

- ✎ Book of compliments (for school memory book, Valentine's Day, or birthdays):
 - ✎ Something positive about each classmate.
 - ✎ Something you admire about each classmate.
 - ✎ Why you admire that characteristic or behavior.
- ✎ Expert writing:
 - ✎ What you're an expert at and how you feel about it.
 - ✎ How you learned or how you became an expert.
 - ✎ What you do that shows you're an expert (proof).
- ✎ Letter or poem to favorite person:
 - ✎ Three positives about person.
 - ✎ How you feel about them.
 - ✎ Why person is important to you.
- ✎ Small moments:
 - ✎ Best memory (of special class, field trip, teacher).
 - ✎ Most memorable time (with family, friend, pet, classmate).
- ✎ Valentine letters, recalling a special moment (or heartfelt letters for any occasion):
 - ✎ What happened.
 - ✎ Where it took place (re-create the setting).
 - ✎ How you felt about it.
- ✎ Book reviews (with title, author, illustrator, and genre):
 - ✎ Brief overview with "grabber" lead.
 - ✎ Subject of book.
 - ✎ Memorable features to entice reader without giving away climax or conclusion.
 - ✎ Recommendation (who should read it, including appropriate age for readers).

teaching tip

Try Another One

When a student has finished writing or doesn't like her piece, advise her, "Try writing another one."
[poems—3 poems about self]

teaching tip

Show It Off

Display student work in classrooms and hallways in an attractive way that lets visitors and peers read it easily.

- ☛ Personal keepsakes (for classroom or school yearbook or special gift; can include photos):
 - ☛ Best thing about me.
 - ☛ What I love.
 - ☛ What I want you to remember about me.

teaching tip

Let students know that we don't copy over drafts to make them neater (a waste of time). Students recopy and think it's a final copy.

Write Snapshots for Real Reasons

Fourth-grade teacher Tom Fuller had a beginning-of-the-year idea: He'd have his students write short pieces (*snapshots*) introducing themselves, which they could then post on the bulletin board. The final copies would be written on a cardboard cutout of a camera. I agreed that it was a terrific idea but knew we needed to get the kids excited about it in a way that would have meaning for them. Here's what I told them, speaking with lots of enthusiasm:

Kids, here's what Mr. Fuller and I were thinking. We could make a book of snapshots of each of us. When someone visits, we can share our book with them. It would have been so great to have one of you give me a copy of such a book. Then I would know something important about each of you. What do you think? Isn't that a great idea? We could make the whole book in the shape of a camera or come up with another idea.

Then I drafted my own snapshot on large chart paper, thinking out loud (incidentally, it was also a great opportunity to model paragraphs, one paragraph per category).

Peggie Mrs. Routman

I can't go a day without eating chocolate. If I don't have any around, I go out and buy some. I also love fresh flowers and buy ^{a beautiful bunch} ~~some~~ every week.

Some things that I especially like to do are: making jam, teaching in schools, cooking for my husband Frank, and playing with my grandchildren.

The best thing about me is that I am kind and like to do things for people I care about.

My demonstration writing (before students write)

Based on what I had written, the kids and I come up with the following criteria for how their snapshots would be structured:



- ☐ Something you love.
- ☐ Things you especially like to do.
- ☐ The best thing about you.

Remember, I wrote first and set the criteria *after* we examined what I had written.

Then the kids set about writing their drafts, after I set up my expectation that they would work quickly: “I wrote this in four minutes. How long do you think it will take you?” Most kids responded *ten minutes*, and I said I thought that sounded about right.

Kids loved doing the project. The difference between compliance and engagement came about because we made the writing real and provided audience, purpose, and an interesting format; it wasn’t just cookie-cutter writing for the bulletin board.

TRY IT APPLY IT

-  Start the year off by writing snapshots (“little secrets,” current favorite book, best friend, favorite hobby, what I’m expert at, three best things about me or a classmate, or some other easy-to-write-about topic). Set simple criteria to follow after you have written your own snapshot as a demonstration.
-  Publish the snapshots along with photos of each writer. Share them with visitors, parents, administrators, and other students.

Write Lots of Letters

Call me old-fashioned but I much prefer receiving and writing handwritten letters over emails. “There is no substitute for letters, handwritten, pulsing with the vitality of the moment.” I save few emails, but I have files of letters and cards I’ve received over the years. A handwritten letter has the special feel and sound of the person who wrote it. I enjoy writing letters on specially chosen writing paper or cards. It’s a personal way of connecting in our fast-paced lives. Opportunities for letter writing are limitless. Kids can write to friends, parents, teachers, family, companies.

When I work with students, I always bring in the letters I have just written and am about to mail. I told one group of students recently, “Here are the five letters I wrote on the plane. That’s one way I keep up with the people I love and appreciate.”

Take a look at some fourth graders’ valentine letters recalling special moments. (I first shared with students my own letter to my husband Frank.) The criteria for the valentine letter is included on page 198.

2-12-04

The Art Box

I remember when you first handed me that blue art box in the Art Houses parking lot on my very first day of art. When you showed me what was in the box I was amazed. I was staring down at six paintbrushes, a paint-spreader, and the five basic paint colors. Since the day you called me and told me you would sign me up for painting classes I had been anxious to start the classes. I was very excited, but a little bit nervous. I felt so special and loved when you hugged me and said good-bye. I hope you have a fabulous Valentine's Day, Aunt Cindy!

Love,
Claire

2-14-04

Dear Dad,

Do you remember when we went to Long Island, New York to your college reunion together? Mom needed to stay home so you took me with your extra ticket. It made me feel special because we don't get to spend much time together. It wasn't like our usual vacations, because it was just you and me. I made some new friends, and you also rented a nice convertible for us to ride in.

Thank you Dad and have a Happy Valentine's Day!

Love,
Nicholas

2-14-04

ABC Of
The Rockies

Remember last Christmas when we were at your house, in the den, sitting on the chairs and couches listening to the fire crackle? Gran and Grampa you were sitting with Mommy, Daddy, Helen, and me. We were all surrounded by wrapping paper when you both got up and returned with two identical boxes. They were both wrapped in red paper, and when you handed them to Helen and me you said, "Open them at the same time." We found that inside were scrapbooks. At first I wondered why you had gotten us scrapbooks, but as I opened the book it brought back all the memories of the summer we had spent together. I felt that you had really cared about the two weeks we spent with you in the summer, and that you loved us so much that you

would go to all that trouble to make a special scrapbook for us to relive all the exciting times we had together. Happy Valentine's Day Gran and Grampa and thank you.

Love,
Sydney

My Dad and Iat
The Rockies Game

I was spinning in my chair in my room closing my fingers and hoping you would just open the door and ask me if I would like to go to the Rockies Game with you. I was watching TV and overheard Mom and you talking about the Rockies Game and trying to decide whether Lauren or I should go to the Rockies Game with you. I raced back to my room praying and hoping you would pick me. Literally my prayers were answered. I remember when you knocked on my door and asked me,

"Aah-ton, would you like to go to the Rockies Game with me?"

"YES!"

I screamed! At that moment I felt my heart rise up and burst. Happy Valentine's Day, Dad!

Love, Aah-ton.

Provide More Real Choice

In a third-grade classroom working on letter writing, the teacher had decided each student would write a letter to the President of the United States. In the past, these letters had gotten a response from the White House, which the students loved. However, in brainstorming possibilities with this group of students, they posed only superficial questions to ask the leader of our nation (*What is your favorite color?*). I suggested we find out who students really wanted to write to. Their responses included grandparents, cousins, friends they hadn't seen in a while. Brooke enthusiastically said, "This is a person I really want to write to. I'm already on my second page." When students are invested in the topic, they put forth their best effort.

Use Writing to Perform Acts of Kindness






Acts-of-kindness writing includes things like:

- ☐ "I appreciate you" cards and notes just to let someone (custodian, secretary, principal, parent, classmate, teacher) know she or he is appreciated. They can be sent on birthdays, Valentine's Day, any day.
- ☐ Birthday cards for classmates and teachers.
- ☐ Welcome notes to new students or school visitors.
- ☐ A special moment captured in a poem or sketch and given to the person who experienced the moment with you.
- ☐ Thank-you notes.

Such writing is not just good manners; *gratitude* has been found to be a key component of happiness and well-being.

In a second-grade class we wrote thank-you letters to someone we'd never "officially" thanked for a past kindness (see pages 203 and 204). I wrote to Jenifer Katahira, a teacher and friend who welcomed Frank and me to Seattle.

TRY IT APPLY IT

-  Send a brief handwritten note to the parents/caregivers of each of your students during the first few weeks of school saying something complimentary about their child. Besides being a nice thing to do, it makes it more likely you will encounter an open mind if you need to call with a concern.
-  Ask parents to donate writing paper, envelopes, and postcards to be used in the classroom.
-  Ask parents to create a stationery box for their child at home.
-  Set up a classroom "gratitude" message board.
-  Create a classroom "good news" mailbox.

December 2, 2003
Dec. 2, 2003

Dear Zacky,

You have been a great friend. You played with me on the playground at your house. You made me feel good with your letter. You are a great friend. I like having you as a friend. You are my best friend. What do you like about me?

Your friend,
Jon

I Love having you as a friend. I like having you as a friend. You are my best friend. What do you like about me?

Your friend, Jon

Deco 2, 2003

Dear Zacky,

You have been a great friend. You played with me on the playground and at your house. You made me feel good with your letter. You are a great friend. You really are. I like having you as a friend. You are my best friend. What do you like about me?

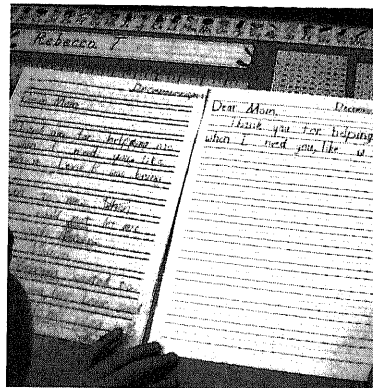
Your friend,
Jon

Jon's draft and final copy of his "Gratitude" letter (notice how hard he has worked on his handwriting)

December 5, 2003

Dear Mom,

Thank you for helping me when I need you, like when Lexie P. was being mean to me. When Lexie would not let me play with Maureen. Maureen wanted to play with me, but Lexie said that I could not play with her. You said just ignore her. You are the best mom ever!



December 5, 2003

Dear Mom,

Thank you for helping me when I need you, like when Lexie P. was being mean to me. Lexie would not let me play with Maureen. Maureen wanted to play with me, but Lexie said that I could not play with her. You said just ignore her. You are the best mom ever!

Love,
Rebecca

Gratitude letter: Rebecca's draft and final copy

EditingSpelling

Fix up most of them.

- * Underline misspelled words
- * Reread your paper at least 3 times
- 2. Try to spell the words correctly
 - Sound it out
 - Look for chunks
 - Look on word wall
 - Look around room
 - Use your quick word book
 - Ask yourself if it makes sense
 - Ask a friend
- * Try writing it another way

Punctuation

Put P, I or . at end of all sentences

* Check if the words are right. REREAD. Check spellingNeatness

handwriting.

slow down
look at draft
~~skip lines~~

Check the format

date
Dear
Love

Capitalization

- Put a capital letter at the beginning of every sentence
- important names
- month
- Dear
- Love
- important places

- Check your end words A
- check your endings (ing, ed)

Establishing editing expectations in grade 2 before students are expected to edit. (See also Appendix J.)

Do More Publishing

When students know their writing will be published for interested audiences, they put more effort into all aspects of their writing. Notice the multiple audiences for the school guidebook written by fifth graders (see page 105). Identifying that wide audience—and then distributing perfect, published copies to them—was instrumental in getting high-quality writing from every student and a published book with no spelling errors.

Publishing can be demanding for writers, especially those who struggle with writing's physical and cognitive demands. If they are available, parent volunteers and teacher aides can really help you out here (but make sure you model first what they are to do so they don't "take over" the child's writing). (Some helpful publishing resources are included in the Notes, on page A-22.)

Word processing is great because it makes revisions easier. While computers can make writing easier and more efficient—cutting and pasting, spelling and grammar checking—computers do not necessarily make writing better. We as knowledgeable teachers help students do that. Be sure students aren't putting more time and effort into elaborate technical presentations than into meaningful, interesting content.

Publish many short pieces for your classroom library. Make copies for other classrooms and the school library. (The accompanying DVD includes examples of such publications.)

teaching tip

For neater handwritten final copies, have students put lined paper under the piece of stationery and clip them together. The lines will show through and make it easier for students to write on the page.